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# Anne Boleyn: Living a Thousand Lives Forever

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**Anne Boleyn:**  
**Living a Thousand Lives Forever**

Amanda Nicholson

Honors Thesis

February 10, 2017

Anne Boleyn appeared at the English court of Henry VIII in 1526. Capturing the imagination of the King and the country, Anne changed the course of English history for all time. Anne's influence supplanted a long-time, well-loved Queen and changed the religion of a country that had been Catholic for over a thousand years. Anne, the sister of Henry's former mistress, first served as a lady-in-waiting to Katharine of Aragon, Henry VIII's first wife, in 1526. Henry and Katharine wed in 1509. The royal couple, despite having a daughter, were desperate to produce a male heir. Anne and Henry began a relationship with that objective in mind. In the ten years that followed, Anne married, birthed a child, and died upon the orders of the King. As there was a considerable amount of infamy associated with her fall from power and subsequent execution, little of Anne remains. The historical accounts of her life are limited in number, and documentation of Anne is scarce. Supporters of Anne, her former friends, and the court itself thought it prudent to cast into the fire most documentation that dealt with Anne.

In an attempt to discover the true historical Anne, I have read a variety of fiction and nonfiction literature. Each work has a different interpretation of Anne, her character, and her motivations. While the majority of these works are fictional historical representations, most were written by historians specializing in British and European history and culture. Less than twenty percent of males were literate during the sixteenth century, limiting the gift of writing to a finite number of educated and prestigious individuals.<sup>1</sup> While documentary evidence does exist, much of what held her true nature, such as her letters and personal effects, were destroyed by Henry VIII and his chief councilmen in the years following her death. Those in positions of power wrote for a purpose and lived in fear of the king. Therefore, much of what is known about Anne is left to interpretation.

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<sup>1</sup> Jean Plaidy. "Jean Plaidy." Goodreads. Accessed February 12, 2017.

Historians have employed the scarce historical documentation to create a picture of who Anne may have been, a quest that has been greatly augmented through fictional histories. Biases and circumstances have also changed over time, allowing for kinder portrayals in later years. Fictionalized versions of Anne are varied and built upon existing histories, and some are more accurate than others. These renditions of Anne and continued interpretations of her life prove that a great interest in Anne still exists. Her changing face over time helps to create a more intimate portrait of her life; one that tells her story long after her death.

Understanding Anne comes with considerable difficulty, given that so little of her life remains. As she is a central figure in English history, having been the Queen of England and the mother of Elizabeth I, she brought important changes to England. Anne ruled in a time when women had little power and were limited by class and position. Having married a man who increasingly acted like a tyrant, Anne's situation was more precarious than most. In the years following her death, fear of Henry VIII and his tyrannical episodes turned Anne's life into a mystery. Little is known of her thoughts, motivations, or desires, just as little is known about the quality of her marriage or the strengths or weaknesses in her character. This has left historians and those interested in Tudor history with many unanswered questions. Why did Anne want to be Queen in the first place? Did she really love Henry? Was religious reform a true passion of hers, or were the changes that took place prior to her reign the result of familial pressures? Three popular authors, Philippa Gregory, Jean Plaidy, and Judith Arnopp have written versions of Anne that help explain the gaps in the historical records. While these stories do not answer the "Anne" question, they do offer new thoughts, ideas, and possibilities.

*The Other Boleyn Girl*, written by Philippa Gregory, was published in 2001. Gregory earned a graduate degree in History from the University of Essex and a PhD in 18th century

literature from the University of Edinburgh. Her writing reflects her interest in the Tudor period.<sup>2</sup> Gregory characterizes her novel as historical fiction. In an author's interview, Gregory explains that she built the bulk of her work around peer-reviewed or historically "agreed upon" secondary source material.

Gregory's story of Anne is told through the eyes of Mary, Anne's older sister, who served as Henry VIII's mistress during the years prior to Anne's reign. The events of the time period, including dates, the major players at court, and the lost pregnancies of Anne and Katharine of Aragon are all historically accurate. Gregory states that she viewed and consulted period art and various other collections, and made several trips to Whitehall Palace when conducting research for *The Other Boleyn Girl*. While attempting to stay true to certain historical facts, Gregory's intent in writing about Anne Boleyn was to provide "a new vision of the Tudor period and some interesting information about the role of women and the inequality of English society."<sup>3</sup> Gregory's work is significant, lengthy, and thorough. The work of other fiction writers on the subject generally borrows heavily from both her opinions and her research.

Gregory paints Anne as a pawn used to further the ambitions of the Howard Family, one of the most powerful families in Tudor England. Henry VIII married Katharine of Aragon in 1509, but the King was rumored to have kept several mistresses throughout his reign. Mary, Anne's sister, was presented as a mistress to Henry in 1515 while his wife was with child. Sadly, Katharine suffered another miscarriage, one of six that she would endure during their marriage. Mary bore Henry a child in 1524. Led by the desires of the Duke of Norfolk, the Howard family sought to replace Mary with another Boleyn girl, and instructed Anne to use her intelligence and charm to win Henry's favor. Anne does as she is instructed, but has her own motivations in

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<sup>2</sup> Philippa Gregory. "Philippa Gregory." Biography - Philippa Gregory. Accessed February 09, 2017

<sup>3</sup> Philippa Gregory. "A Conversation with Philippa Gregory." In *The Other Boleyn Girl: A Novel*, 667-70. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2001.

attempting to gain the love of the King. For Gregory, the defining moment of Anne's life is her love for Henry Percy, a promised boy from a wealthy family. The pair married in secret, but the marriage was denied by Cardinal Wolsey. While the historical evidence that a secret marriage transpired is scarce, it is a possibility. As Mary was in the King's favor at the time, any secret union would have brought scandal to the family. In Gregory's novel, Anne had a strong desire, if not a vehement will, to seek vengeance against Wolsey, Henry, and Mary Boleyn. Anne, driven by familial duty, augments the desires of her family with her own. A formidable woman, she wins the heart of the King through various tricks that she learns from her sister and the occasional prostitute. She is cunning, refusing to yield to Henry until they are legally wed. As Henry is unfamiliar with any form of denial, her continuing refusal ignites a fire within him. The pair become inseparable, and over time, Anne becomes Henry's right hand in matters of state.

Gregory's Anne is an educated woman, a fact that is corroborated by Tudor historian Susannah Lipscomb. In her documentary, *Henry & Anne: The Lovers Who Changed History*, Lipscomb offers that Anne was taught religion, elocution, literacy, and manners while serving in the French court in her youth.<sup>4</sup> Anne's behavior reflects these teachings. Having spent so much time in a foreign country, Anne's mannerisms and forms of speech are French, and it is a badge that she wears proudly. The ways of the French have afforded Anne an independent nature, one that Gregory leans heavily upon. Anne's desire for religious reform and her will are both a result of her time in France, and her hold over Henry is credited to the strength of her mind. She is different, charismatic, and highly sensual. Gregory's Anne is also exceedingly cruel. While attempting to paint Anne as a feminist of sorts, she is presented as an ill-used conniving woman who will do anything to achieve her ends. She poisons several people, including Queen

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<sup>4</sup> *Henry & Anne: The Lovers Who Changed History*. By Suzannah Lipscomb. Directed by Chris Mitchell. Performed by Jack Hawkins, Emma Connell. London: Lion TV, 2014. DVD.

Katharine, and causes the deaths of many during her time at the Tudor court. Gregory's Anne is jealous and lacking in empathy or sympathy, and these are the characteristics that cause her early demise. Her short-lived marriage to Henry ends abruptly with her refusal to accept his affair with Jane Seymour, the woman who would become his third wife. Gregory's portrayal of Anne is the most unforgiving. While other authors afford her the benefit of the doubt, Gregory's Anne is a woman without goodness or character.<sup>5</sup>

*The Kiss of the Concubine: The Story of Anne Boleyn*, written by Judith Arnopp, was published in 2013. She is a hobbyist author of historical fiction with an interest in Anne Boleyn and Tudor England. Her works bridge the divide between the known and unknown while attempting to highlight the lost voice of England's women. Arguing that the lack of feminine history was a blight upon our understanding of the sixteenth century, Arnopp explains that women were often misunderstood, presented as evil or complaint, and denied an opportunity to tell their stories.<sup>6</sup> *The Kiss* borrows heavily from the work of Philippa Gregory and includes many of the same liberties. It is likely that Arnopp used Gregory's work as a starting point and built her story from its pages. Amongst other things, Arnopp's work includes stories that Gregory fabricated, such as the burning of a miscarried fetus and the admission of an illicit relationship with George Boleyn.

While *The Kiss of the Concubine* differs on several points, she presents Anne kindly, offering a unique opportunity to see past the events that surround her short life. Arnopp crafted her book from the first-person perspective, telling the story of Tudor England through Anne's eyes. By using this stylistic device, the reader is able to walk through Anne's mind freely. Arnopp includes Anne's thoughts on several key historical issues, and focuses on her desire to

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<sup>5</sup> Gregory. *The Other Boleyn Girl*, 17.

<sup>6</sup> Judith Arnopp. "Author's Note." In *The Kiss of the Concubine*, 335-38. Place of Publication Not Identified: Feedaread Com, 2013.

reform the church. She also paints Anne as a loving and caring woman, one who valued family and children and has a genuine desire to engage in acts of philanthropy. While Gregory focuses on the negative aspects of Anne's character, Arnopp shows her as a victim of the times. As seen in *The Other Boleyn Girl*, Anne is forced into her courtship with Henry by the desires of the Howard Family. However, Arnopp offers that this changed into a genuine love over time. Their mutual fondness for one another brought about the changes in England without any cruelty on Anne's part. Her early demise is credited to Thomas Cromwell, who conceived a plot against Anne in an attempt to regain sole control of the Church of England. He tortured several men until they confessed to having committed adultery with the Queen, and brought his evidence to Henry. Here, Anne is the victim of court politics, not a perpetrator of violence. Arnopp's Anne smiles at the time of her death, thinking nothing but penitent and hopeful thoughts.<sup>7</sup> Arnopp's novel also includes information about the sexual habits of Henry and Anne, giving the story an interesting twist that departs greatly from others of its kind.

*The Lady in the Tower*, written by Jean Plaidy, was published in 1986. As the oldest fiction novel in this project, it serves as a baseline for how the image of Anne may have changed over time. Legally named Eleanor Hibbert, Plaidy specialized in historical fiction. She used facts and historical sources to craft new interpretations of old stories.<sup>8</sup> Plaidy references the work of George Cavendish, as well as several other sources commonly used in Boleyn histories. She worked under many pseudonyms and her novels were multi-genre. It is an interesting and insightful interpretation of the happenings of Tudor England.

Plaidy paints Anne as a woman on a mission. *The Lady in the Tower* is written in the first person, much like *The Kiss of the Concubine*, and offers a more forgiving view of Anne than is

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<sup>7</sup> Judith Arnopp. *Kiss of the Concubine*: Feedaread Com, 2013. 331.

<sup>8</sup> Jean Plaidy. "Jean Plaidy." Goodreads. Accessed February 12, 2017.



found in general histories. After Wolsey destroys Anne's happiness by thwarting her attempted marriage to Henry Percy, she vows to seek revenge against him. Plaidy's Anne is intelligent. Her education and keen insight are what drive her. As such, Plaidy paints Henry as the driving force behind their union, the great divorce, and England's break with the Catholic Church. Anne hesitates in her relationship with Henry out of anger, refusing his advances out of concern for her virtue. She also fears that she will end up defamed like her sister, Mary. Despite what is common for the times, Anne has a great deal of confidence. She does not feel obligated to succumb to the will of the King. While others live in fear of Henry's temper, Anne knows how to control him. Her repeated refusals are what make her a Queen.

Plaidy's book is written as a confessional piece. Anne is reflecting upon her life in the days prior to her death. The author uses historical events to depict Anne as soft and virtuous. Plaidy's Anne is less flippant and sophomoric than the one penned by Judith Arnopp. She is sophisticated and aware of her surroundings. Written in the mid-eighties, Plaidy's Anne is coy and demure. While Arnopp and Plaidy both discuss Anne's sexual thoughts, Plaidy's characterization of her shows a marked progression in the standards of female conduct. In the days prior to their legal marriage, Anne is afraid to give herself to Henry because she worries that he will find her unsatisfactory. She understands that she can excite Henry very easily with her intelligence and her ability to converse, but she fears that he will not like her with her clothes off. Plaidy writes, "But in a sexual encounter, how should I fare.....I, a novice with no great enthusiasm for the game compared with doyonnes of the art like my sister, Mary?"<sup>9</sup> By contrast, Arnopp's Anne is a vixen gifted in the art of fornication. Women in the early eighties were far more conservative. In 1983, there was a push by the University of Minnesota to limit the traffic of pornography in Minneapolis. Vulgar writings were deemed exploitative and demeaning to

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<sup>9</sup> Jean Plaidy. *The Lady in the Tower*. New York: Three Rivers Press, 1986. 266.

women. This became a widespread movement, enlisting the support of several feminist writers and journalists.<sup>10</sup> Interpretations of Anne's story in the 1980's would have represented a societal push away from feminine sexuality. It is also important to consider that at the time of the publication of *The Lady in the Tower*, Jean Plaidy was nearing eighty years old. Her impression of acceptable standards of female conduct would have been influenced by the mores of her generation.

Plaidy's portrayal of Anne speaks more to the history of women and shifting conventional attitudes more than any other. In her novel, Anne is confident but well-mannered, sassy but virtuous, and pushed along by the will of powerful men. While she does have a score she wants to settle, her love for Henry and their decision to marry are the precursors to her deflowering and subsequent destruction. Anne is demure. When describing the intimate details of her life, as this story is written in the first person, Plaidy's Anne is always humble. The language and literary devices espoused in this novel contribute to an overall feeling of placidity. While history tends to view the story of Anne and Henry with a sordid lens, Plaidy presents their lives as if she were writing *Pride and Prejudice*.<sup>11</sup> She writes, "Queen Katharine was gentle and kind to me. I think she was a little sorry for me because my proposed marriage to Henry Percy had been so ruthlessly prevented....she showed no rancor towards me."<sup>12</sup> When Henry speaks to Anne, it is with the same gentleness. "You know to whom I refer. It is you, Mistress Boleyn. You have plagued me ever since the first moment I set eyes on you."<sup>13</sup> Henry reads like any other character from a great love novel. He has a presence, and Anne becomes overtaken by his ardor and sensuality.

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<sup>10</sup> Andrea Dworkin. "Pornography: Men Possessing Women." In *Feminism in Our Time: The Essential Writings, World War II to the Present*, by Miriam Schneir, 419-20. New York: Vintage Books, 2006.

<sup>11</sup> Jane Austen. *Pride and Prejudice*. London: Routledge, 1994.

<sup>12</sup> Plaidy, *The Lady in the Tower*, 150.

<sup>13</sup> Plaidy, *The Lady in the Tower*, 155.

While fictionalized versions of Anne are interesting and allow for an expanded understanding of who she may have been, non-fiction writings are essential when attempting to create a holistic view of important historical figures. As each historian who revisits the idea of Anne has their own interpretation of primary and secondary source material, no two writings on the life of Anne Boleyn are ever the same. The scope of each historian is limited by his or her area of interest, while source materials are limited by time, cultural issues, religious proclivities, gender issues, political alliances, and personal affinities. This allows for as many historical Annes as can be found in fiction writings. The following books each give Anne a different slant, and within each, she achieves a new voice.

*The Creation of Anne Boleyn: A New Look at England's Most Notorious Queen*, written by Susan Bordo, was published in 2013. As a cultural historian and writer, her work details an overtly feminist view of Anne Boleyn. Bordo's research is impressively thorough, but her style of writing is inflammatory and she spends much of the book negating the opinions of other writers and historians. Her purpose in writing is to find the feminine side of Tudor England. Like Judith Arnopp, Bordo feels that Anne has been misunderstood and misrepresented. She pens Anne as a "free-thinking reformist intellectual," and uses a third-wave feminist approach, which embraces ideas of feminine equality and power, to revisit long-held assumption about Anne and her character.<sup>14</sup> Due to Bordo's writing style and her frequent mention of the fictionalized historical mini-series, *The Tudors*, her work can best be described as a fun mix of history and pop-culture. She attempts to compare and contrast the many portrayals of Anne that have existed throughout the history of television and literature. Bordo describes the mystery of Anne as "an

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<sup>14</sup> Susan Bordo. "Introduction." In *The Creation of Anne Boleyn: A New Look at England's Most Notorious Queen*, xv. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2013.

incompleteness” in the historical record, arguing that Henry VIII’s attempt to erase Anne from Tudor history has allowed her to live a thousand lives forever.<sup>15</sup>

David Starkey wrote *Six Wives: The Queens of Henry VIII* in 2003. As a British Constitutional historian, Starkey has spent his life writing and researching the history of the United Kingdom. He earned a degree from Cambridge where he specialized in the history of the Tudor family, and has conducted extensive research into the lives of Anne Boleyn and Henry VIII. Starkey feels that prior to the dawn of feminism, there was little need to revisit the idea of Anne Boleyn. The Women’s Rights Movements of the 1960’s and 70’s and a push towards feminine independence created a desire to understand the stories of women throughout history. Anne was vilified by time and circumstance and remained so in the popular record for many centuries. Starkey did not attempt to paint Anne with a feminist brush. His work relies upon the writings of Eustace Chapuys and George Cavendish, both of whom were present and literate during the Tudor period. He also notes the love letters exchanged between Henry and Anne in the sixteenth century. While only seventeen of these letters remain, as the writings of Anne were likely destroyed, their loving nature speaks to a genuine romance between Henry and Anne.

Leaning towards the writings of Cavendish, Starkey argues that Henry VIII ordered the dissolution of Anne’s betrothal to Henry Percy, causing her to maintain a long-held grudge against Cardinal Wolsey. He writes that Henry held an open desire for Anne, and under the urging of the King, the relationship was dissolved.<sup>16</sup> Starkey describes Anne as beautiful, elegant and in possession of eyes that could melt a room. She had a naturally detached yet fiery demeanor, tried too hard, and asserted herself too freely. He also notes her French mannerisms and states that she had many suitors, a factor that may have caused Henry’s attention to navigate

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<sup>15</sup> Bordo, *Creation of Anne*, xvii.

<sup>16</sup> David Starkey. "Anne Boleyn." In *Six Wives: The Queens of Henry VIII*, 275-76. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2003.

towards her. Starkey's Anne is manipulative, sly, and exceedingly strong. He feels that Anne was the driving force behind England's break with the Roman Catholic Church, and that the divorce proceedings against Katharine of Aragon began at Anne's behest.

Starkey's perception of Anne is villainous. He paints her as cruel and without empathy. Due to the limits of her age and bouts with jealousy, Anne held ill will towards Queen Katharine and Mary Tudor. She maintained a great desire to "out-do" the reign of the former queen. Anne was cruel towards Katharine and the Princess, attempting to aggrandize herself through their reduction and destruction. She also chastised Henry frequently and publically, casting a shadow over their relationship and her position as his wife. Anne's failure to provide a male heir combined with her ill-temperament led to dire consequences. Like every other woman who had given him children, Henry lost interest in Anne sexually. His infatuation with Jane Seymour, his increasingly ill demeanor, and Thomas Cromwell's own personal ambitions led to what Eustace Chapuys deemed "charges built upon presumption without valid proof."<sup>17</sup> Starkey believes that Henry grew tired of Anne's tantrums and wished to end the marriage.

*Six Wives* offers Anne in comparison to Henry's other wives. As Starkey has presented the wives in order, Anne's history appears in between the chapters written on Katharine of Aragon and Jane Seymour. This literary structure gives Anne a shadow that must be overlooked. As Katharine and Jane were loyal and kind, Anne's actions seem more nefarious than they might if Henry's six Queens were each given their own book. Starkey's Anne is similar to the portrayal offered by Philippa Gregory but more factually arrayed. His picture of Anne is created through source opinions, and is offered without the benefit of creative license.

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<sup>17</sup> David Starkey. "Anne Boleyn." In *Six Wives: The Queens of Henry VIII*, 578. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2003.

*The Tudors*, written by Richard Rex, was published in 2002. The Director of Studies in History at Queen's College in Cambridge, he has written extensively on Tudor England. Rex's opinions seem to match those of David Starkey, who credits Rex's *The Tudors* as the best introduction to England's most important dynasty. Rex's work is interesting because it establishes a baseline of the Tudor family before the days of Anne Boleyn. He paints Henry as a pious and educated young man who was conscientious without being extravagant. Henry had an interest in the faith, was a devout Catholic, and the changes that came in later years would have seemed unlikely. Henry penned a book against the writings of Martin Luther in 1521, and was strongly opposed to radicalism in all its forms.<sup>18</sup>

After meeting Anne, Henry's character seemed to change along with the conditions, politics, and religion of England. Anne, too, seemed to suffer under the pressure of the relationship. Rex's perception of Anne is very matter-of-fact and offered with little conjecture. Anne's tenure as queen ended because she failed to provide an heir and Henry was already in love with another woman. Rex credits Anne with the religious changes that occurred during the Tudor period. The chaplains that were formerly in her service were anointed as Bishops of the church during her reign as queen.<sup>19</sup> He offers that she was educated and pious, and that she held a great interest in the protestant reformers. Rex's accounts focus on Anne's contributions to the Tudor Dynasty as a whole. Rather than engage in her character individually, Rex speaks of Anne with the same regard as the rest of the Tudor family. His accounts are limited to highlights only, such as Anne's efforts towards religious reform and the birth of Elizabeth I. In that respect, his portrayal of Anne is one of the most kind and merited.

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<sup>18</sup> Richard Rex. "Henry VIII." In *The Tudors*, 44-45. Stroud: Tempus, 2003.

<sup>19</sup> Rex, *The Tudors*, 46.

*Inside the Tudor Court, Henry VIII and his Six Wives Through the Eyes of the Spanish Ambassador*, written and compiled by Lauren Mackay, was published in 2014. She is a writer and a historian specializing in the affairs of the Boleyn family. Mackay chronicles the opinions of the Tudor court's Spanish ambassador, Eustace Chapuys, and offers commentary on her research. As Eustace Chapuys was both a friend to Katharine of Aragon and a devout Catholic, his opinions of Anne are exceedingly harsh. His language towards her is inflammatory and generally unforgiving, and he labels her as everything from a witch to an immoral harlot. Chapuys remarks on Anne's confidence, an effect he finds unnerving. He also felt her attire was inappropriate for the times. Chapuys credits Anne with Henry's downfall, an opinion shared by Richard Rex. He writes, "Though the King is by nature kind and generously inclined, the Lady Anne has so changed him that he does not seem the same man."<sup>20</sup> He further explains that she is an evil that needs to be remedied, and offers concerns that Anne may attempt to cause harm to Queen Katharine.<sup>21</sup> Chapuys thoughts and comments are historically accountable, making their inclusion in any assessment of Anne paramount. While the motivation behind Anne's actions remains unknown, her behavior appears callous and pernicious. On the days leading to her coronation, Anne commandeered the barge of Queen Katharine, destroyed her coat of arms, and requested the royal jewels that were in the former queen's possession.<sup>22</sup> Chapuys could not prove that Anne had ordered these injustices herself, but her repeated lack of empathy suggests that she was jealous and unfeeling when relating with others. Anne also appears to be a sixteenth century version of "the younger woman," a story that is still popular in society today. After Katharine had spent twenty years helping Henry in his royal and religious successes, Henry's eye turned

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<sup>20</sup> Lauren Mackay. "Pawn to Queen." In *Inside the Tudor Court: Henry VIII and His Six Wives through the Writings of the Spanish Ambassador*, 124-27. Stroud: Amberley, 2013.

<sup>21</sup> Mackay, *Inside the Tudor Court*, 125.

<sup>22</sup> Mackay, *Inside the Tudor Court*, 130-32.

towards another and his wife was discarded. According to Chapuys, Katharine handled the matter with grace and class, while Anne threw tantrums and insisted on having her way. Katherine also showed concern for Henry's well-being and for the good of the country as a whole, while Anne refused to yield to Henry's wishes, requesting Katharine's position and possessions without any regal manners, composure, or experience.<sup>23</sup> Through Chapuys' eyes, Anne appears to be a young and covetous mistress, drowning in ambition, but lacking in the education that a life in the public eye brings. Philippa Gregory takes a similar approach.

*The Lady in the Tower: The Fall of Anne Boleyn*, written by Alison Weir and published in 2010, chronicles the period and events surrounding Anne's beheading. As a historian specializing in the history of the United Kingdom, Weir felt that there was a lack of definitive research into Anne's final days. Weir emphasizes Anne as young, reminding readers that she was ten years younger than Henry. She denotes that Anne was graceful and very "French," but not particularly beautiful. According to common source material, she was dark-skinned, flat-chested, and she had a double-nail on one of her fingers; a fact that made some assume she was a witch or touched by demons. Her dark appearance, her long dark hair and eyes, and her mannerisms were uncommon and not considered attractive for the times. Wealth, status, and health were aligned with a fairer skin and lighter tone.<sup>24</sup> Weir does not attempt to speculate on Anne's inner desires, but focuses on the events and people surrounding the beheading. Unlike other writers of the Tudor period, Weir's opinions are well-balanced. She offers explanations and discards any theory that seems implausible or contradictory. She also speaks to the credit of the sources she has chosen to use and builds her own arguments upon their merit.

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<sup>23</sup> Mackay, *Inside the Tudor Court*, 131.

<sup>24</sup> Alison Weir. *The Lady in the Tower: The Fall of Anne Boleyn*. New York: Ballantine Books, 2010. 3-5.



Weir, similar to Starkey, leans heavily on the writings of Chapuys, stating that they are “among the most important sources for this crucial period.”<sup>25</sup> Chapuys hated Anne but was a friend to Henry and frequently present during Anne’s reign. Henry was kind to Chapuys. The level of kindness in their relationship suggests that the malevolent actions taken towards Katharine and Mary were not Henry’s intent, but Anne’s. Chapuys described Anne as “the person who manages orders and governs everything, whom the King does not dare to oppose.”<sup>26</sup> Weir offers that Anne was openly confrontational, inflammatory, and had a tendency to emasculate the King’s men. For that reason, she was at odds with most of the Tudor council at the time of her death. A plot to remove her was likely, if not certain, for Anne had few friends and many enemies. Thomas Cromwell, who is universally believed to be a key player in Anne’s death, confided in Chapuys that Anne had once wished for Henry’s death. Cromwell felt that she was unkind and ungrateful, and that the king deserved a better wife.<sup>27</sup> The comments of Chapuys and Cromwell are biased, but not without merit. Cavendish, who was also present during the time period, holds a similar opinion of Anne. Without yielding to speculation and relying merely on those facets of Anne that have primary evidentiary support, Weir’s Anne is lacking in beauty, thin, French, and dark. She is also argumentative, fiery, barbarous, and self-indulgent. According to Weir, Anne only showed remorse or empathy upon the hour of her death, when she bemoaned her fate and that of Katharine of Aragon. She placed little blame upon herself, but offered that the King grew tired of her as he had his former Queen.<sup>28</sup> Weir credits Anne’s fall as a lesson in morality. Her beheading was the price she paid for her misdeeds.

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<sup>25</sup> Weir, *The Lady in the Tower*, 30-31.

<sup>26</sup> Weir, *The Lady in the Tower*, 54.

<sup>27</sup> Weir, *The Lady in the Tower*, 55.

<sup>28</sup> Weir, *The Lady in the Tower*, 201.

The popular story of Anne Boleyn has a famous connotation that is hard to escape. Her legacy invites assumptions and misconceptions that are the result of a lack of information and evidence. This makes finding the historical Anne difficult. Most of the primary sources from the sixteenth century, with regards to Henry VIII's infamous second marriage, were destroyed under Henry's orders upon the nullification of their union. As preparations for his marriage to Jane Seymour had already begun, any trace of Anne's existence was removed from court. Redecoration began immediately, altering the couples' home to suit the tastes of his new wife, a woman remarkably different than Anne, and any talk of Anne was ill-advised. The letters that remain are from Henry to Anne, indicating that he felt a strong love and passion for her, but her return correspondence is missing. Anne's common prayer book, known as *The Book of the Hours*, somehow escaped these mass purges and contains her handwriting, suggesting that she did feel something for Henry. She wrote secret messages to him within the pages of the book, as well as little notations about the lines and prayers she found thought-provoking. She was a pious woman, or at the very least, she enjoyed reading and self-education.<sup>29</sup> There are also a few remaining letters of state and various exchanges between Anne and different members of the high court. Other than her daughter Elizabeth, who went on to reign as Queen of England and Ireland for forty-five years, little else still exists.

Most of what is known about Anne is the result of stories that began with the writings of Eustace Chapuys and George Cavendish. *Thomas Wolsey, Late Cardinall, his Lyffe and Deathe*, written by Cavendish, contains the only contemporary account of Anne's early days at court. He remarks that Henry harbored a secret passion for Anne, but was unsure if she was aware of it.<sup>30</sup> Henry openly showed affection towards her, but at the time, Anne was in love with Henry Percy.

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<sup>29</sup> Weir, *The Lady in the Tower*, 202.

<sup>30</sup> Starkey, *The Queens of Henry VIII*, 274.

She believed that Percy was to become her husband, and did not return the King's affections.

According to Cavendish, Henry took Cardinal Wolsey into confidence, told him of his desire to install Anne as his official mistress, and asked him to have Percy removed. As the pair were genuinely in love, marked by the tears shed by Percy during his removal and forced marriage to Mary Talbot, it is likely that Anne held ill feelings towards Wolsey, her family, and Henry VIII.

Cavendish, who was present at court during the time of these events, remarked that Anne said,

"If it lay ever in her power, she would work the Cardinal as much displeasure as he had her."<sup>31</sup>

Henry Percy and Anne were forbidden from seeing one another, and she was removed from court for six months to get Percy off her mind. Many things may have transpired in Anne's mind during her stay in exile.<sup>32</sup> Removed from her family, her love, and the comforts of court, she was left with a considerable amount of time to think. The Anne that returns to court and wins Henry's favor is not the same one that left, and if she had been permitted to marry Henry Percy, she may have been a different person all together.

The accuracy of Cavendish's accounting of events has been questioned by historians, because the dates are dicey, but most agree that Henry instigated the relations between he and Anne and that she succumbed under family pressures. It was unwise to refuse Henry outright. Anne, as an intelligent woman, was likely well-aware of the precarious nature of her position. Those who disagreed with Henry or failed to give him what he desired found themselves on the block, whether they be friend or foe. Upon considering her options, Anne made Henry wait – for seven long and arduous years. We know that the wait was hard for him, as he states this repetitively in his letters to Anne. He writes that their separation "would have been almost

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<sup>31</sup> Starkey, *The Queens of Henry VIII*, 277.

<sup>32</sup> Starkey, *The Queens of Henry VIII*, 278-79.

intolerable” if it were not for his firm belief in her return of his affections.<sup>33</sup> Just before Christmas of 1526, in what is believed to be Henry’s first year in pursuit of Anne, he wrote her expressing interest in installing her as his sole official mistress. She spent a great deal of time considering her response, a length some historians consider to be more than eighteen months, and then sent Henry a gift agreeing to receive his love. From the time of this gift and from their public declaration of love, Anne remained chaste and in refusal for another five years. Their legal wedding did not transpire until 1533.<sup>34</sup>

This tells us a great deal about Anne, her character, and the events surrounding the accounts written by Eustace Chapuys and George Cavendish. Chapuys’ account augments the opinions of Cavendish, stating that Henry had forgotten himself in his quest for Anne. He writes, “The King showed greater favor for the lady every day” and “that has greatly attracted much attention here.”<sup>35</sup> His behavior was unbecoming of a King and out of character for Henry, and this caused a great scandal in the kingdom. As both accounts agree that Henry was brash and unreasonable during his courtship with Anne and both agree that he was the instigator during their relations, the length of the waiting period can only be attributed to Anne’s common sense and virtue. While other women were content to lodge themselves as Henry’s mistress and he generally kept more than one woman as a bedded companion, Anne’s refusal was what separated her from others of her kind. Her motivations are unknown, but her voice in the matter was clear. She would not be used.

Early primary sources help to confirm the image of Anne as virtuous and strong. After losing her great love, she rose again. Anne challenged those who wronged her and was sent away to rethink her actions. Upon her return, she came back anew; with a new purpose and a new

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<sup>33</sup> Starkey, *The Queens of Henry VIII*, 278.

<sup>34</sup> Starkey, *The Queens of Henry VIII*, 282.

<sup>35</sup> Mackay, *Inside the Tudor Court*, 76.

agenda. She defied the will of the king while managing to build and strengthen his affections. Anne instilled herself in court within the public eye without concern for the way she may be perceived. She was mindful of the effect she had on Henry and used it to her advantage. Anne worked to bring about religious reform and to challenge long-held customs and institutions that were cruel to women. Her defiance changed the whole of England for all time. Those many years of persistence may have cost Anne her life, but they helped to establish her as a revolutionary. While the goodness of her nature and the extent of her weakness are open to interpretation, Cavendish and Chapuys' early accounts highlight few of her many strengths.

From this point forward, historians disagree greatly about the historical Anne. While all seem to agree that she was strong, willful, obstinate, and highly intelligent, the extent of her character is a point of contention. Richard Rex, author of *The Tudors*, points to the difference in Henry's behavior before and after Anne Boleyn, but offers little commentary on her character. He establishes her as pious and speaks to her efforts with respect to religious reform. Rex speculates that the hiring of evangelical bishops between 1534 and 1536 was due to Anne's influence, as she was well-read in theology.<sup>36</sup> He credits her failure to give Henry a son as the reason for her fall, but offers few other details.

Dr. Suzannah Lipscomb, like other young scholars, believes that Anne was simply misunderstood. In her review of the book, *Anne Boleyn: Fatal Attractions*, by G.W. Bernard, she credits Henry VIII with our present idea of Anne. Lipscomb believes that Henry was passionately in love with Anne and shocked by the accusations of adultery. Henry's narcissistic tendencies are well-known and obvious when looking at Tudor histories. Everything from the art he commissioned during his reign to his writing style paints him as larger than life. He was not a

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<sup>36</sup> Rex, *The Tudors*, 66.

man who liked to be questioned, and hated the idea of being wrong. In the sixteenth century, the only reasonable excuse for a woman to commit adultery was a lack of sexual attention from her husband. Henry, who was already sensitive to issues of sexuality because of Katharine and Anne's many miscarriages and his inability to produce a surviving legitimate male heir, would have had a great desire to dispel those claims at all costs. Lipscomb argues that in the days following Anne's arrest, Henry engaged in an extravagant amount of self-pity, accused Anne of sleeping with more than a hundred men, and defamed her to his oldest daughter. In his humiliation, he composed a written tragedy about his life and invited his friends at court to read it. As these were the words of the King, it would have been unwise to assume that Anne was anything other than an adulterous witch out to destroy Henry and the country. He married Jane Seymour within two weeks of Anne's death to prove that he was not to blame for Anne's discretions.<sup>37</sup> As a virile, wealthy, and powerful man, it would have made him look weak to wait to remarry. As such, Lipscomb believes that Anne became, in memory, who Henry declared her to be, robbing Anne the opportunity to have her own history.

David Starkey asserts that Anne had an audacious spirit. He labels her as bold, and as his style of writing is inflammatory and prone to drama, he questions the majority of Anne's motives and behaviors. He accuses Anne of poisoning Henry against Cardinal Wolsey, torturing Katharine and Mary Tudor, and poisoning several men of court. He also writes about Anne's relationships prior to her years with the King, both with Henry Percy and Thomas Wyatt, and describes her as a player and a huntress. Referencing the poems of Wyatt, Starkey offers that Anne was exciting, difficult, and tantalizing. Wyatt called her, "a fire that me brent."<sup>38</sup> Anne was exotic and had many admirers, but Starkey feels that there is little evidence to suggest that she

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<sup>37</sup> Suzannah Lipscomb. "Henry VIII and the Fall of Anne Boleyn by Dr Suzannah Lipscomb." The Anne Boleyn Files. September 14, 2010. Accessed February 10, 2017.

<sup>38</sup> Starkey, *The Queens of Henry VIII*, 270-71.

was anything other than a flirt. She enjoyed the attentions of men, but kept her favors to herself. He feels that Henry sought to possess Anne because she was popular at court. Having Anne as his mate would have served as an ego boost for Henry, who had ego issues to begin with, rendering this idea entirely probable. The most popular boy generally wants to be seen with the most popular of ladies.

Starkey argues that Anne spearheaded the religious reform movements that permitted the end of Henry's marriage to Katharine of Aragon.<sup>39</sup> As Henry was a pious Catholic prior to his relationship with Anne Boleyn, her influence in this area seems likely. Starkey's work paints Anne in a less-friendly light than that of Lipscomb and Rex. He includes several brutal comments allegedly made by Anne throughout her time at the Tudor court that would suggest she suffered from want of personality. She often came across as crass and insensitive, and seemed to have an unkind word for nearly everyone. Anne accused Henry of being unable to fornicate properly and she wished every Spanish woman was "at the bottom of the sea."<sup>40</sup> When Henry and Anne's daughter was born, Anne requested the christening garment that belonged to Katharine of Aragon, suggesting that she thought little of insulting the former Queen. Quoting Chapuys, Starkey writes that Anne was full of jealousy and spite. He mentions an argument where Henry and Anne fought publically, where upon she emasculated him in front of the members of court. Afterwards, he did not speak to her for several days. Chapuys also had written that Anne requested the newly-illegitimate Princess Mary as one of her ladies' maids.<sup>41</sup> According to Starkey and Chapuys, the historical Anne was educated, virtuous, pious, and reform-minded, but also callous, cold, manipulative, and selfish. Unlike Lipscomb, neither feels

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<sup>39</sup> Starkey, *The Queens of Henry VIII*, 420.

<sup>40</sup> Starkey, *The Queens of Henry VIII*, 435.

<sup>41</sup> Starkey, *The Queens of Henry VIII*, 510.

that Anne was misunderstood. They tend to favor the general historical opinion that she was a self-indulgent, ruthless woman.

As an interesting change of pace, Susan Bordo offers a more holistic view of Anne than has been articulated previously. She believes that the rise of feminism allowed for a kinder interpretation of Anne's actions and attitude. Like Lipscomb, she credits Henry with the idea of Anne as a witch and a cruel whore. Bordo feels that the idea of Anne has been created by false and outdated feminine stereotypes and common myths. While giving credence to the popularity of the work of David Starkey, she offers that his writing is "dramatic fantasy" when it comes to his version of Anne. Bordo argues that there is little evidence to suggest that Anne was manipulative or intentionally cruel, despite the written source material that corroborates Starkey's assertions. She also expresses that Starkey is not alone in his version of Anne. Several writers throughout history have argued that Anne was a hard and displeased woman. In the 1884 biography written by Paul Friedmann, he writes, "Anne was not good. She was incredibly vain, ambitious, unscrupulous, course, fierce, and relentless."<sup>42</sup> Bordo mentions that during the nineteenth century, Anne's story was often looked at by pro-protestant writers and historians, and most continued to believe that Anne was at fault. Even those in favor of reform felt that she was ill-intentioned. The image of Anne as a ruthless woman seems to pervade earlier historical and fiction writings and continues into the present day. Given the nature of her indiscretions and the written accounts of Cavendish and Chapuys, it becomes hard to argue that she was a good person in any respect.

While Bordo does not feel that Anne was innocent, she believes that many have taken undue liberties with the level of hate lodged in Anne's heart. She discredits the writings of

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<sup>42</sup> Bordo, Susan. *The Creation of Anne Boleyn: A New Look at England's Most Notorious Queen*. New York: First Mariner Books, 2013. 4-6.



Chapuys, saying that he was not a reliable source because of his devout Catholicism, his Spanish heritage, his closeness with Katharine of Aragon, his love for Mary, and his hatred for Anne Boleyn. Bordo asserts that it is unfortunate that the main primary accounts of Anne's life were written by people prone to extensive biases. Like other historians, Bordo credits Chapuys and Cavendish with what she calls "common Anne mythology."<sup>43</sup> She believes that Anne was a self-made woman with a challenging personality.<sup>44</sup> Given that all early histories were written by men, it would have been impossible for them to understand the inner workings of a woman, her personality, and her sense of things. Histories written in the sixteenth century tended to favor men. As gender equality is a more recent concept, one that has evolved in the past one-hundred-and-fifty years, Anne was doomed to be one of two things; weak or evil. Unfortunately for her, the waves of history have dubbed her as both.

Alison Weir's opinion of Anne, like other historians, is mostly inflammatory and unkind. Weir speaks to the events Anne found herself involved in, and given that there are many instances that could only be cruelly constructed, she believes that Anne – for the most part – was nefarious in her dealings. Early in *The Lady in the Tower*, Weir speaks of Anne's behavior during the death of Katharine of Aragon. As she was a well-loved Queen, the entire country mourned her passing in serenity, giving credit to her memory. By contrast, Anne wore an audacious shade of yellow for the day, extending a "calculated insult to the memory of the woman she had supplanted."<sup>45</sup> Quoting Chapuys, Weir states that Anne rejoiced over the idea of Katharine's death, making her look petty and childish in the eyes of the public. Her frequent insult of Katharine and rude behavior towards Mary further press the idea of her as someone impatient, vengeful, and ill-tempered. She also blamed the King for the loss of their second

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<sup>43</sup> Bordo, *The Creation of Anne Boleyn*, 8.

<sup>44</sup> Bordo, *The Creation of Anne Boleyn*, 203.

<sup>45</sup> Weir, Alison. *The Lady in the Tower: The Fall of Anne Boleyn*. New York: Ballantine, 2010. 17.

pregnancy, stating that his behavior and dealings with Jane Seymour caused her great pain.<sup>46</sup>

Weir feels that if Anne had been more gently-disposed, her life may have been spared.

Weir speaks at length about Anne's religious efforts, and while Anne's motivations are unknown, her education and appreciation in this area afford her some goodness. Weir describes Anne as a "passionate and sincere evangelical," stating that she owned a library full of reformist biblical literature. She believes Anne was sympathetic to the cause of the Lutherans and favored the ideas of Martin Luther. Anne's possession of an illegal copy of the Tyndale Bible proves that she had not wholly embraced protestant ideas, but was rather a woman who found value in all religions.<sup>47</sup> She was a hobbyist and enjoyed theological studies. Anne wanted to reform the Catholic Church, but still considered herself a Catholic until the hour of her death. Anne's piety is one of the few redeeming qualities Weir, like other historians, gives Anne credit for.

The research conducted and penned by historians on the character of Anne Boleyn tends to vary but is forced to align along a certain framework. All historical accounts begin with Chapuys and Cavendish, and any research into Tudor England would be incomplete without their writings. As there are many schools of historical research and thought, such as social, cultural, and feminist history, revisiting these sources can offer new thoughts and interpretations. However, everything comes down to one simple question. Can Chapuys and Cavendish be believed? There are several problems with the "technical" version of Anne that spring from these writings. While they are the only primary accounts of the life of Anne Boleyn, they are, as noted by Susan Bordo, excessively biased and limited in their scope.

Chapuys' writing erred in a number of ways. Religion, familial ties, gender constraints, and issues of class may have skewed his perception of the events. As a devout Catholic, a

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<sup>46</sup> Weir, *The Lady in the Tower*, 20.

<sup>47</sup> Weir, *The Lady in the Tower*, 16.

Spanish subject, and a friend to Katharine of Aragon, everything he recorded has to be carefully scrutinized. He was an educated and literate man, a combination rare for the times, but he went to England with a purpose and an agenda. He was a friend to Henry VIII, but his main function was to ease diplomatic relations between England and Spain. Chapuys' ties to his home country must always be taken into account. His fondness for Katharine of Aragon and for Mary Tudor likely stemmed from his devotion to Spain, adding fire to his opinion of Anne Boleyn. The idea of supplanting a Queen, especially one so regal and connected, was also unheard of for the times. The marriage between Henry VIII and Katharine of Aragon was conceived as a political alliance between two countries. After the death of Arthur Tudor, Katharine served as a bargaining chip to be used to achieve peace. She performed her function admirably and with a great deal of gentleness. Offering any kind word to Anne would be an insult to Charles V, Katharine's nephew, a fact that could have cost him his position, his life, or both. For this reason, whether Chapuys liked Anne or not can never be truly ascertained. He wrote what would be acceptable to Spain. His impressions of Anne may have been outright fabrications, alterations of historical events, or written with the express intention of pleasing Charles V. Chapuys frequently suggested that war with England would provide the best future for Katharine and Mary after they were disgraced, while also trying to keep the peace with Henry VIII and perform his duties at the English Court.<sup>48</sup> His allegiance to Spain was clearly paramount.

It is also important to understand that Chapuys was an ordained Catholic, and as the Spanish Ambassador, had a great distaste for France. Spain and France were frequently at odds with one another, rendering all things French a sore point with him.<sup>49</sup> Anne's time spent in France, her audacity, and her behavior, may have made a bad impression upon Chapuys. While

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<sup>48</sup> Mackay, *Inside the Tudor Court*, 169.

<sup>49</sup> Linda Porter. *Mary Tudor: The First Queen*. London: Portrait, 2007. 84.

he never commented specifically on her French mannerisms and style of dress: he frequently insulted her brashness and her lack of regality. His religious and legal backgrounds are also an issue. In 1515, Chapuys received a doctorate degree in civil and law canons. He was ordained two years later, and began working in legal aid.<sup>50</sup> Chapuys was a humanist, and as such, he had a close fondness for hopeless cases. According to Mackay, he held “sympathy for the unorthodox and a liking for victims of injustice and desperate causes.”<sup>51</sup> As an ordained Catholic and a person close to Rome, it would have been impossible for Chapuys to look at Anne impartially. Katharine was the aunt of the King and a devout Catholic. Religion was the law of the land in the sixteenth century, and Henry’s “great matter,” the name he granted to his desire to divorce and remarry, was seen unfavorably by Rome. It would have been impossible for a man of the cloth to condone Henry’s behavior or his mistress, as the two were seen in public together prior to their marriage. Henry’s relations with Anne, in the eyes of the church, would have always been construed as adultery. The Catholic Church only recognizes one marriage, and this would have skewed Chapuys’ perception of Anne before the pair even met. Combined with his legal background, Chapuys’ natural tendency would have been to support Katharine, as she was the one in most desperate need of help. Collectively, it would have been nearly impossible for an ordained, Spanish, Catholic humanist lawyer to admit that the King’s affair was a sound idea. Chapuys could never have been a truly credible witness, leaving every historical assessment of Anne open for debate.

George Cavendish’s portrayal of Anne is slightly more credible in terms of biases, but his interests in writing had little to do with Anne Boleyn. The timing of his work is also questionable for two reasons. Cavendish’s biography focused on the life of Cardinal Wolsey, who was ill-used

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<sup>50</sup> Peter G Bietenholz and Thomas Brian Deutscher. "Eustace Chapuys of Annecy." In *Contemporaries of Erasmus: A Biographical Register of the Renaissance and Reformation*, 291-95. London: University of Toronto Press, 1985.

<sup>51</sup> Mackay, *Inside the Tudor Court*, 60.

by Henry in his attempt to divorce Katharine of Aragon. As Cavendish served as an usher for Wolsey, his opinions likely mirror those of Wolsey himself. Cavendish paints Anne as cruel and as a person of little merit. He worked in Wolsey's service for eight years, taking notes of his many conversations and movements. The Cardinal died in 1530. Between 1554 and 1558, Cavendish compiled his manuscript detailing the events of Wolsey's life.<sup>52</sup> Cardinal Wolsey worked closely with Henry VIII for many years. Wolsey always worked to suit himself or to appease the desires of Henry VIII and was a man of questionable character. Among many other things that could be considered morally repugnant, Wolsey was accused of embezzlement and of maintaining a mistress while in service of God. Amongst Catholics, this is a forbidden practice. Like the opinions of Chapuys, anything offered by Cavendish has to be looked at under advisement. Anne was whatever Henry deemed her to be during her time at court. To Wolsey, the issue of Anne was central and his opinions were strong. As a person in Wolsey's confidence, George Cavendish is certain to have heard the best and worst of the Cardinal's dealings with Anne, but his opinion could never have been his own. Cavendish did not complete his writings until after Henry's death, rendering them hearsay at best. At the time his writings were circulated, there were few left to contradict his assertions and little point in doing so. Most of the key players were dead and Chapuys was in ill health.

It is also important to note that Cavendish's manuscripts, while not officially published during his life, were circulated during the reign of Queen Mary. This would have limited the acceptability of the content of the material. As the daughter of Katharine of Aragon, Mary held an open hatred for Anne Boleyn. Mary was a devout Catholic and married to Phillip of Spain. More importantly, she had a cruel and unforgiving temper. In an effort to return England to

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<sup>52</sup> "George Cavendish." In *The Encyclopedia Britannica*: 11th Ed., 579-80. 11th ed. Vol. 5. New York: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1910.

Catholicism, she burned hundreds of Protestants and evangelicals at the stake for heresy. It would have been unwise to publish any historical account that defamed Queen Katharine or painted Anne in a positive light. Even if Cavendish had written of Anne favorably in his notes, admitting that she held redeeming qualities would have been a death sentence. This was as true in Mary's time as it was in the time of Henry VIII. Journalism was not as free in the sixteenth century as it is today. For the circulation of the piece to have been allowed to continue, it would have had to been rendered acceptable by Mary Tudor. As Cavendish died in 1562 and his manuscript survived until its official publication in 1641, we are left to assume that its contents were acceptable to the Queen.

As David Starkey and Alison Weir differ little in their interpretations of Anne, the strengths and weaknesses in their portrayals of the young Queen can be easily addressed simultaneously. Starkey's portrayal of Anne is the most brazen and contains conjecture and innuendo. His book is also highly dramatic. Starkey writes, "Henry and Anne were, in short, Macbeth and Lady Macbeth – and Anne, like Lady Macbeth, frequently took the initiative."<sup>53</sup> In *Macbeth*, written by William Shakespeare, the Macbeths are a selfish and misguided couple who murder at will to please their own ends.<sup>54</sup> This literary connection forces an undue sense of malice onto the story of Anne and Henry. He also describes Anne through a series of interesting similes and metaphors. He writes, "Anne was bold as brass and wanted to show off too."<sup>55</sup> There is no evidence to support the idea that Anne liked to show off. She was educated and well-dressed, but her motivations have always been unknown.

Starkey's opinions are brazen, but they establish a spectrum with which to gauge each portrayal of Anne against. He serves as the extreme in non-fiction writings. Alison Weir's Anne

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<sup>53</sup> Starkey, *The Queens of Henry VIII*, 285.

<sup>54</sup> William Shakespeare and Kenneth Muir. *Macbeth*. London: Bloomsbury, 2013.

<sup>55</sup> Starkey, *The Queens of Henry VIII*, 286.

aligns with Starkey's, but is far less inflammatory. The problem with both of their accounts is that they leave little room for the idea of Anne as good. They credit her seeming piousness, but rely too heavily on the ideas and accounts of Chapuys and Cavendish. Starkey and Weir build upon these early primary sources, and attempt to gauge Anne's motivations from them. As there is no actual evidence that she did many of the things she is accused of, such as torturing the Princess Mary, these histories can only be seen as fictionalized, sensationalized, or augmented, marking them as dramatically similar to fiction novels.

Of the non-fiction writings, Susan Bordo's assessment of Anne is the most thorough, but is not without its problems. She criticizes the undue reliance upon the writings of Chapuys and Cavendish. Bordo also criticizes the writings of David Starkey, suggesting that his work gives Anne an unkind edge that is off-putting and undeserving. Bordo writes from a feminine perspective, giving Anne a voice that she has not had previously. Her vision of Anne as a leader is nice in theory, but given that Anne lived in a time when female independence was frowned upon, it is difficult to argue that she was a feminist. By today's standards, Anne could be described as such. By all accounts, Anne knew how to play the system to her advantage. Given the time period, it is probable that most financially affluent women were trained in the art of seduction. If a woman was not from a good family, she would have become reliant upon her beauty to survive. The fact that Anne had family connections, class, and was trained in feminine wiles is not shocking for sixteenth century. She may have been ill-tempered, but her behavior was a part of her character. Anne's audacity won her the hand of a long-married King and led to England's break with the Catholic Church. Bordo is right to speak to Anne's intelligence, but that is the only obvious thing about Anne. She feels that writings of Anne have become increasingly kind with the rise of feminism. When not writing from the point of view of the

patriarchy or from an outdated Victorian standpoint, Anne's motivations seem less iniquitous. However, as Bordo beautifully asserts, no Victorian version of Anne could be correct, for that would be placing nineteenth century mores on sixteenth century historical figure.<sup>56</sup> For this same reason, no feminist interpretation of Anne has absolute merit. It would be hard to apply revisionary feminism to the writings of Cavendish and Chapuys. During Anne's reign, women were given few freedoms, and Cavendish and Chapuys, as stated previously, were limited in their literary freedoms by social customs, politics, and fear.

In attempting to compare Anne to women of today, we are failing to address the idea that life in the sixteenth century was very different from today. While these opposing narratives give Anne an edge that Cavendish and Chapuys do not allow for, they are limited by the standards of today. Feminism will continue to change and our view of Anne will change along with it. What is important, as Bordo has suggested, is that time has allowed us to appreciate the struggles Anne faced. Even if the idea of Anne as a feminist has little merit, we are able to see that she was neither wholly bad nor good, but a combination in between. When not held down by the opinions and voices of Catholics, Victorians, Queens, and Kings, Anne emerges as someone much like the rest of us. Her desire to protect her daughter, Elizabeth, may have been the precursor to her ill treatment of Mary. Fear for her position at court, given that her sister and Queen Katharine had been previously discarded, may also have been the driving force behind her tantrums.

Fiction writings on the subject of Anne Boleyn are far more dramatic. While many of the narratives lean on historical sources in attempting to nail down time frames and other significant accuracies, fiction authors have the freedom to explore Anne on a whole new level. Philippa Gregory, being the queen of Anne-related fiction, is frequently copied and has lent her voice to many fictionalized portrayals of Anne. Gregory, like Jean Plaidy, writes Anne as an extreme.

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<sup>56</sup> Bordo, *Creation of Anne*, 159.



Understanding that she has taken a great deal of creative license, it is easy to read her work and become lost in “what-ifs” and “maybes.” Was Anne an adulterous woman who had relations with her brother to produce an ill-fated male heir with the King? If that was the case, could this explain her final miscarriage? Was the closeness between Anne and George Boleyn platonic, or were the pair close lovers as Gregory suggests? Gregory’s ideas allow readers to play with everything they think they know about Anne, to speculate upon the potentiality of extreme rumors like these, and to have a little bit of fun with an historical figure that is largely unknown.

Some of the claims Gregory presents are so brazen, they seem almost implausible. However, a great number of them are rooted in at least some historical truth, creating further questions and opportunities for research. She takes the ideas of Chapuys and Cavendish and spins them a bit further, creating a very harsh and brazen character that makes the reader feel sorry for everyone Anne associates with. There are upsides to this kind of fictionalized portrayal. As so much of Anne’s life is unknown, fiction is able to fill in the blanks. Most of what is known about Anne is hearsay or the result of deduction. Gregory takes these areas of doubt and turns them into something substantial. The problem with her narrative is that she has chosen to write it from Mary Boleyn’s point of view. This gives the reader an interpretation of Anne that would be closer to home had it been historically accurate. However, Mary is another character that is largely unknown, and as she writes from a place of jealousy, her opinion is questionable. Much like in historical renderings, Anne is offered in comparison to another woman. Gregory has exchanged the wronged Katharine of Aragon with the less-jaded Mary Boleyn. Mary sympathizes with Katharine’s plight, frequently expressing concern for the former Queen’s well-being. While it is an interesting attempt in showing a new layer of Anne, it is a one-sided portrayal and still leaves much to the imagination. As Mary is in Anne’s inner circle, the reader

becomes privy to conversations and exchanges that allude to what Anne may be thinking. At the very least, we know what she is saying. The motivations, however, remain absent.

The excessive cruelty in *The Other Boleyn Girl* differs little from Chapuys' statements. It does provide a clear path from A to B with respect to Anne's slow walk towards the chopping block. The brutishness is outlined carefully, and Gregory leaves little room for speculation. Anne not only thought about these things; she did them. She poisoned men at court. She tortured Princess Mary. She poisoned Katharine of Aragon. She stole Henry VIII from her sister, Mary. She adopted Mary's child with the King, young Henry, as to give Henry an heir. She slept with George Boleyn, and she engaged in witchcraft in an attempt to win Henry's favor. When Anne dies at the end of the novel, it is a well-deserved ending.

Jean Plaidy and Judith Arnopp give Anne a layer of humility. Plaidy's novel offers a much kinder Anne, one that is more romantically arrayed. She presents Anne as a girl who is love-struck and pining over the King; a man ten years her senior. Like any young girl in love, Anne babbles and coos when thinking and speaking of Henry. As her novel is written in the first person, Anne's own thoughts and remembrances are expressed. There is a great deal of talk about love, and this sets Plaidy's Anne apart from other portrayals of her character. *The Lady in the Tower* was written in the 1980's, before the rise of feminism in the 90's and after the free-for-all that existed in the 1970's. The idea of the female as dominant or independent was not prevalent at that time. Women were not granted the right to establish credit without their husband's permission until 1974.<sup>57</sup> In the 1980's, middle class women were appreciated for being smart, beautiful, and sensuous. Female sexuality was acceptable within the confines of the

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<sup>57</sup> Patricia Hill Collins. *Black Sexual Politics: African Americans, Gender, and the New Racism*. New York: Routledge, 2006. 76.

domestic sphere, as can be seen in the decade's examples of sitcom innuendo.<sup>58</sup> As such, Henry is written as the aggressor. This idea holds a great deal of truth with respect to Anne, as given the gender roles of the sixteenth century, the idea of Anne pursuing Henry is unlikely. She may have been a "huntress," as Starkey claims, but this could have only been the result of passive-aggressive behavior. Plaidy's Henry is romantic and forward, and plays nicely with the love letters that remain in the historical record. While a poor writer by today's standards, Henry was smitten with Anne in a great way.

In response to Henry's ardor, Plaidy presents an Anne that is sweet, genuine, gentle, loyal, and pious. She refuses Henry because she wants to remain a virgin for her husband. This is also a play on the ideas of the 1980's; a time period that espoused a return to family values. Gregory's Anne and Jean Plaidy's Anne were published nearly twenty years apart. In 2007, it was acceptable to write Anne as an evil witchlike dominatrix. In 1986, alpha Anne would not have been well-received. Twenty-first century Anne is fox-like in her dealings, but like the décor of the 80's, Plaidy's Anne is presented as a doily. She becomes almost like a character in a telenovela or a well-loved soap opera. She is a victim whereas Gregory's Anne is the aggressor. This says more about the acceptability of the idea of the powerful female and less about Anne and her character. Plaidy reduces Anne in many ways, and there is a great deal of fault in this. She ignores the comments made by Chapuys and Cavendish, even though they are biased, and gives Anne an entirely new disposition; one rooted in a Scarlet-O'Hara-like ideology that robs Anne of the independent nature she has been known for. The Anne of the historical record is loud-mouthed and assertive. Plaidy's Anne is excessively polite. She is the antithesis of herself; as if Anne, herself, were contradicting the historical Anne. It does give her a voice that history has denied her; that of a soft-hearted woman in love. While this portrayal of Anne has little

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<sup>58</sup> Collins, *Black Sexual Politics*, 140.

merit, is questionable, and reads like a Harlequin romance novel, it helps to create a new map of Anne's character; one that leaves room for ideas that are not proven or absolute.

*The Kiss of the Concubine* is the unbelievable of the books I have assessed. It is clear that the author had recently read *Fifty Shades of Grey*, and a good portion of the middle of the novel is allocated to Henry and Anne's sexual encounters.<sup>59</sup> Despite this anomaly, Arnopp's Anne is a combination of Gregory's and Plaidy's. She is soft, demure, and thoughtful. However, she is also a powerful woman. Arnopp's Anne is heavily affected by the women of today, just as Plaidy's Anne was written from an 80's perspective. This makes for an interesting mix of ideas concerning the finding of the historical Anne. Given that we know little about her personality beyond the thoughts and opinions of two learned men, she could have been any or all of these things. Henry was known for keeping an official mistress, but it was not uncommon for men to visit brothels in the sixteenth century. While unlikely, it is possible that Anne visited various "ladies of the evening" when learning how to seduce Henry. It is also possible that she sought advice from her sister in the art of seduction. There is nothing in the historical record about Henry and Anne's sexual liaisons, and Henry tired of Anne after childbirth as was his custom. This has little bearing on Anne and says more about the fickle nature of Henry's affections. However, to have won Henry's love in the first place, she would have been as Chapuys suggested; demure, sensual, sexy, charismatic, and charming.

Arnopp's writing is unrefined and shows Anne from a girlish perspective. She is flighty in her thoughts and has a whimsy to her behavior and mannerisms. She is like the Catherine Howard of later years; young and inexperienced, but assertive and aware of her effect on men. Anne is not sexually dominant in Arnopp's novel, but she is sultry. She enjoys the attention she receives from Henry, and is eager to please him on all levels. Given that Anne was young at the

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<sup>59</sup> E.L. James. *Fifty Shades of Grey*. New York: Vintage Books, 2015.

time of their courtship, these character traits are also possible. When attempting to romance a King that was known for his volatile temper and egomania, maintaining arousal and a certain level of entertainment would have been important. Unlike Katharine of Aragon, Anne had not been subjected to the frustrations of marriage and a public life at court. For her to have been immature and temperamental is a near certainty.

When combining both history and fiction in an attempt to find the true historical Anne, it is easy to become lost in hearsay and speculation. Anne spent a mere three years at court, and given the holes in the historical record, it is impossible to paint a whole and complete picture of the former Queen. Due to the biases and restrictions of the early writings of Eustace Chapuys and George Cavendish, the historical Anne is largely one-sided. When presented as the antithesis of Katharine of Aragon, Anne seems like a tempestuous child intent on winning the greatest chair in the land. Chapuys was the Spanish Ambassador and employed by Charles V, the nephew of Katharine. As such, his accounts of Anne and her behavior are questionable. He was also a devout ordained Catholic, a well-educated attorney, and had interests to maintain in two different countries. On one hand, Chapuys was forced to protect the interests of Spain, and with it, the wife of the King of England. On the other hand, Chapuys was tasked with maintaining diplomatic relations between Spain and England while assuaging the ebbs of Henry's temper. His job was a difficult one, and thus, his opinions of Anne could never have been fair. His frequent references to "the concubine" and "the dark whore" may have been written to appease the King of Spain, who would have frowned at the idea of Anne as anything other than common. Chapuys' comments were also inflammatory, as there is no proof that Anne held ill intentions towards Katharine of Aragon or Mary Tudor. There is also no evidence that she poisoned members of court. There is little primary evidence with respect to Anne, giving potential

credence to each and every assault and accusation lodged against her. Chapuys clearly took issue with Anne's behavior, mannerisms, and her desire to remove the Queen of England from the throne. As an ordained Catholic, it is also likely that he took issue with Anne's efforts in religious reform. Chapuys was a member of the true church and a friend to Rome. These facets of his character would have rendered an impartial impression of Anne impossible. As his account of Tudor England is one of the few in existence and credited as the most reputable, the true historical Anne cannot be found when looking at his account alone.

George Cavendish's version of events mirrors those of Eustace Chapuys but is limited in other ways. Cavendish was a writer and servant to Cardinal Wolsey, giving a hint of bias to the recordings he worked through over time. Cavendish's opinions were likely tainted by the frustrations and behaviors of Cardinal Wolsey, a man who was known for his underhanded and umbrageous dealings. The fact that his manuscript was not presented until after the death of Henry VIII, nearly twenty years after Anne's death, renders his opinions questionable. Any mention of Anne during Henry's lifetime would have been considered treason, but the manuscripts were released during the reign of Mary Tudor. Queen Mary was well-known for her hatred of Protestants and for her ill temper. Cavendish could not have presented a kind interpretation of Anne. To have done so would have been a great slight to the Queen, given that Anne was directly responsible for the defamation of her mother. Any writings offered by Cavendish during this time period would have to have met with the approval of Mary, rendering his accounts of Anne fruitless if not entirely without merit.

Given that the two main primary sources of Anne's life contain considerable bias, any historical writing of her life begins as flawed. Historians David Starkey, Richard Rex, Susan Bordo, Suzannah Lipscomb, Alison Weir, and Lauren Mackay attempt to investigate Anne's

desires and motivations. Each created a slightly different version of Anne using the same source material. This is attributed to their research as historians, but also to their additional work in the field. Some, like Lipscomb, used art history to augment their findings on the subject of Anne. This is beneficial, as even on the issue of her looks, there is a considerable amount of debate. Some historians describe her as attractive, while others mention that Anne's complexion would have been a limiting factor. In a time when women were valued for their light eyes and blonde hair, Anne's dark and sensuous ways were an anomaly.

Given that historians cannot agree on the nature of her looks, what can be agreed upon with respect to Anne? Starkey, Rex, and Weir adhere to the idea of Anne as strong-willed and cold. Starkey and Weir offer an Anne that held little regard for anyone other than herself, and paint her as the aggressor in her relationship with Henry. They do, however, acknowledge that she was pushed forth by the desires of her family, limiting the choices that would have been available to her. Both cite Cardinal Wolsey's breakup of Anne's betrothal to Henry Percy as the reason for her behavior. Starkey writes that Anne held a grievance against Wolsey, an idea put forth by Cavendish, and the heartache from that loss may have tainted the rest of her days. All are in agreement that Anne was unkind and lacking in genuine personality. She did not have the softness often associated with women, and her brashness was upsetting to the people at court. Starkey and Weir feel that Anne's behavior towards Henry, Katharine, and Mary Tudor was intentional and conducted with forethought. Anne won the hand of the King because she refused to yield to him, making her a prize to be won. They also unanimously agree that Anne's efforts brought forth England's break with the Catholic Church, adding a dark connotation to the issue. Starkey and Weir believe that the entire fiasco surrounding the King's "great matter" was Anne's

doing, and that her motives were inherently selfish. Limiting their opinions to the writings of Cavendish and Wolsey, both historians align with the popular view of Anne.

Lipscomb and Bordo deviate from this perception and offer that Anne was misunderstood and a victim of the times. Any history of Anne Boleyn is held captive by the limits of historical time periods. As a woman, Anne's life is measured by the confines of her role at any given time. Lipscomb argues that Anne was a romantic who deeply loved Henry, while earlier writings and other historians feel the match was the result of the upward desires of the Howard family. She presents examples of Anne's writing in the *Book of the Hours* as potential proof that there was more to Anne and Henry's romance than we are privy to. She faults Henry with Anne's legacy, arguing that her history was limited by Henry's behavior in the days following Anne's beheading. In his great haste to remarry, Henry destroyed all evidence of Anne's existence, leaving only fragments of the woman who was Queen for such a short time. Lipscomb's Anne aligns with Susan Bordo's rendition, who also feels that Henry's egomania cast a shadow over Anne for all time. Anne Boleyn will always be offered as a measure of who she was not. She was not Katharine of Aragon, rendering her less than Queen-like. She was not a man, therefore lacking in a genuine voice. She was not blonde and she was not the typical woman. In that, she was not willing to reduce herself to satisfy the King. Anne was an all or nothing woman, and she went from one extreme to the other rather quickly.

The fictionalized Anne Boleyn is as varied as the historical Anne. As fiction writers have attempted to bridge the gap between what is known and what is assumed, all have taken a different approach to the Anne question. Philippa Gregory paints Anne as a vindictive, spiteful, cruel-hearted woman who has few morals and no character. Every behavior she exhibits is arranged with forethought and selfishly derived. She writes on the extreme end, providing food



for thought and ideas for other writers. Some, like Judith Arnopp, mock her style, borrowing events and characters that Gregory created. Arnopp's Anne is kind, sensual, a good mother, and loyal to Henry and England. The charges brought against her were the result of a ploy arranged by Thomas Cromwell to suit his own ends. Jean Plaidy, having written her story in 1986, differs greatly from the other two accounts. Her Anne reads like a soap opera starlet. Plaidy's Anne was relentlessly pursued by Henry and romanced into making poor choices. The Anne of the mid-eighties serves as an example of the times' attempt at renewed morality. She is well-mannered and soft, a side of Anne that has never been espoused formerly.

In examining the differing accounts of Anne Boleyn, both historical and fictional, it seems that there will never be one true Anne. There are many Annes, and each new generation will find something new about her to love and hate. In Anne Boleyn, we have a woman who was concerned about the way she appeared and highly intelligent, as discerned from her manner of dress and her level of education. She was attractive, but not overly beautiful. Anne's beauty was in her confidence, a thing some found audacious and insulting. Her frequent correspondence with Henry suggests that there was a genuine love between the two that was heady and passionate. Her alleged outbursts can be attributed to the stress of her situation and the follies and temperaments of youth. Unfortunately, Anne will always be known as the woman who lost her head and supplanted Katharine as Queen. Neither can tell us much about her, leaving room for fictionalized augmentations that will always change with the days and years. Each new peek into Anne's life will provide another version, allowing Anne to live a thousand lives for all eternity. In the end, we know very little. Anne was born, had siblings, married fruitfully, gave birth to a daughter, and died quite young. All else is open to interpretation.

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